Technology has revolutionized the ability to access information. In mere seconds you can find answers to almost any question thanks to the internet and all its tools: Google, Wikipedia, Skype, etc. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) across continents can be consulted in every corner of the world. Along with this instant access of information comes the expansion of education and how one gains knowledge. Colleges and universities are jumping on the distance education revolution and are offering prestigious courses to anyone with internet access – and many are for free!

**MOOCs**

Massive Online Open Courses, or MOOCs, are the wave of higher education right now. Harvard, MIT, Stanford, University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, University of Manitoba, University of Prince Edward Island, and London’s King’s College are just a few of the institutions around the world who have more and more offerings online, making international education accessible like never more. Not only do these open doors allow those who were perhaps hesitant about the “college experience” to try out just one course or two, but by having online education accessible in high schools teachers can now challenge their students like never before. Enhancing both ends of the spectrum, higher achieving students can take college level classes, earning credit while in high school, and those needing developmental courses to bring them up to college level can complete that training early and not lose a semester of college, delaying graduation, because they were not prepared for higher level material.

**Badges**

Mozilla has also introduced an interesting concept in certification called badges. Upon completing training of any variety someone can earn a badge and post it to their online resume. While you may not have a degree from MIT in physics, when applying to your next job you can show employers that you have successfully completed several courses (and passed the assessments) via the badges you earn. This ability to earn the knowledge, and prove it through completing real assignments and assessments, without the cost of a traditional degree is mind blowing to most traditional education specialists.

It has been tradition in many industries for professionals to complete continuing education credits in order to stay on top of their changing markets. With technology exploding into all disciplines, badges serve as documentation in online portfolios to show completion of up-to-date trainings, be them credit, non-credit, adult education, workplace trainings, or industry or national certifications. Increasing the accessibility to job-specific training raises the bar and fosters excellence for every professional.

**Things to Consider**

While it is crucial for educational institutions to grow with the times and access new student markets, it is important to stay grounded in the fundamentals of education and recognize that not all disciplines can be taught online. Some things just need to be demonstrated and experience in a face-to-face classroom environment.

MOOCs lead to much more competition in enrollment numbers. It will be important for schools to focus on what their faculty does best. Offering multiple general education classes in an attempt to cast a net over a wider population of students will not lead to a successful business plan. Schools should maximize those disciplines they are known for and target those audiences of students for their excellence. This self-control will not be easy for institutions and will prove to be a big piece of the puzzle as education changes with technology.

**Websites with a wealth of knowledge on the subject:**

* “10 Hottest Ed-Tech Stories of 2012.” 2013 Jan 2. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/10-hottest-ed-tech-stories-of-2012/41413?cid=wc&utm_source=wc&utm_medium=en>
* Badges. <https://wiki.mozilla.org/Badges>
* Harvard Open Courses: Open Learning Initiative. <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/open-learning-initiative>
* “How California’s Online Education Pilot Will End College As We Know It.” 2013 Jan 15. <http://techcrunch.com/2013/01/15/how-californias-new-online-education-pilot-will-end-college-as-we-know-it/>
* “Massive Online Open Courses.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course>
* MIT Open Courseware. <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>
* “MOOCS, Online Learning, and the Wrong Conversation.” 2013 Jan 2. <http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/moocs-online-learning-and-wrong-conversation>
* “Mozilla Launches Webmaker Badges, Linked to Persona, So You Can Brag About Your Mad Code Skillz.” 2012 Nov 10. <http://thenextweb.com/dd/2012/11/10/mozilla-launches-webmaker-badges-linked-to-persona-so-you-can-brag-about-your-mad-code-skillz/>
* Open Badges. <http://openbadges.org/en-US/>
* The Mozilla Blog. <http://blog.mozilla.org/blog/2012/11/10/webmaker-badges/>
* “The Qualified Job Applicant, Redefined.” 2012 May 30. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesmarshallcrotty/2012/05/30/the-qualified-job-applicant-redefined/>
* “Top Universities To Offer Free Online Courses.” 2012 Dec 14. <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/12/14/universities-offer-free-online-courses_n_2298618.html>